

## State Commission

The Arkansas Service Commission manages a portfolio of 12 AmeriCorps State programs with 366 AmeriCorps members serving in 75 counties addressing critical needs in the areas of education, healthy futures, economic opportunity and veterans' services. In the 2014-2015 program year, as a result of Arkansas AmeriCorps programs, 13,776 students completed K-12 education programs, 3,307 students showed academic improvement in literacy and math, 1,722 youth engaged in activities to reduce childhood obesity including nutrition education, 519 youth participated in mentoring programs that led to improved school attendance, and 216 economically disadvantaged individuals received job training or other skill development services. A total of 145 AmeriCorps members completed their terms of service by serving as teachers in high needs schools, and 38 teachers remained in the education field after service. Additional projects include the Governor's/KARK Community Service Awards.

## AmeriCorps State

Teach For America Arkansas AmeriCorps members serve as teachers in high-need schools in greatly underserved areas of Arkansas. Members serve in the following school districts: Dumas School District, Lakeside School District, El Dorado School District, Camden Fairview School District, KIPP, Helena-West Helena School District, Pine Bluff School District, Lighthouse, Earle School District, Blytheville Public Schools, Barton-Lexa Public Schools, Cross County School District, Marked Tree School District, Lee County School District, and Stuttgart Public School District. For the 2014-15 program year, Teach For America was awarded 160 full-time AmeriCorps members. The impact of these AmeriCorps members in Arkansas is great and is meeting the need of lack of educational opportunities for students in Arkansas. For example, in Arkansas, the connection between poverty and educational attainment is clear, as less than eight percent of low-income students graduate from college (Arkansas Child Poverty Update, Reeve 2012). The intervention is placing Teach For America teachers in high need school districts. During the 2014-2015 school year, 2,135 students taught by Teach For America members improved in math and literacy, and 4,596 students improved in all content areas.

In the Future Teacher Initiative AmeriCorps program sponsored by the Southeast Arkansas Education Service Cooperative, 30 AmeriCorps members serve in schools and provide early childhood education development to prepare children for school. Members serve in these southeast Arkansas counties: Ashley, Bradley, Calhoun, Chicot, Clark, Cleveland, Drew, and Faulkner. The program's main mission is to enable each targeted student to achieve kindergarten readiness. Developing and attracting more interest in the field of education is also a key factor in the success of the program. A current survey revealed 18 former members have completed their degrees in education and are employed as teachers, administrators, and high school coaches. The members provide one-on-one and small group tutoring to 360 pre-school students. The at-risk students are tracked and academic growth and/or change is measured using the KRIC assessment. This assessment is recorded Pre-, Mid and Post during the program year. Of the 360 students who were tracked in 2014-2015, 84% of the students served showed academic improvement in literacy, and 83% displayed higher math skills. The program has a positive impact on both the children served and in the members themselves, and is helping meet the educational needs of students in Arkansas.

## AmeriCorps National

City Year Little Rock AmeriCorps has 54 members who serve full-time at six schools, helping students at greatest risk of dropping out. The members support more than 3,750 students. City Year AmeriCorps members work alongside teachers, using research-based tools to improve students' attendance, behavior, and performance in math and English. The members also lead afterschool programs and school-wide initiatives to improve school culture. Thanks to the members' service, 82 percent of students in grades 3 through 5 improved their overall literacy score and 86 percent of teachers agreed that City Year AmeriCorps members improved overall focus and order in the classroom.

FoodCorps AmeriCorps members serve in Fayetteville, Huntsville, Lawrence County, Little Rock, Marshall and Springdale. FoodCorps is a nationwide team of AmeriCorps leaders who work under the direction of local partner organizations to connect children to real food and help them grow up healthy. They teach children hands-on lessons about food and nutrition build and tend school gardens, teach cooking lessons, and help change what's on lunch trays so that children can eat healthy food from local farms. In the last year, the FoodCorps members in Arkansas served 5,857 children, built or brought back into use 7 school and community gardens, harvested 2,363 pounds of produce, and recruited 259 community volunteers.

## AmeriCorps VISTA

The Apple Seeds AmeriCorps VISTA project serves Northwest Arkansas youth through garden-based educational programming. More than 3,985 students participated this program year. The project has harvested and shared 3,205 pounds of vegetables from the Apple Seeds Teaching Farm with students. VISTAs coordinated and hosted 850 students at Farm Lab, a two-hour field trip for elementary students that educates them on where their food comes from. The VISTAs organized students to create 25 garden markets in their schools, resulting in 41 percent of the attending students replicating the snacks offered at home. In addition, student participants distributed 596 pounds of food and were able to reach 1,487 people through these markets. The VISTAs coordinated a student volunteer team that prepared and distributed 709 recipe bags filled with healthy ingredients for students to take home and prepare in their kitchens. They also developed and executed a school garden workshop that trained more than 30 teachers from 20 different schools how to develop and sustain school gardens.

AmeriCorps VISTA members with Our House in Little Rock had a tremendous impact on every aspect of the organization. One VISTA conceived of, directed, and produced Project Voice, a 12-part documentary series featuring Our House clients telling their own stories. The documentary series is a powerful outreach and fundraising tool that has already enabled the organization to reach new donors, raising \$45,000 at a one-hour event in which the films were shown to community members unfamiliar with Our House. VISTAs have also established highly effective partnerships, including one with a local employment agency that resulted in a streamlined job-application process for clients. VISTAs helped raise \$2,717,380 by coordinating two major fundraising events, each of which raised a record amount of funds. Thanks to these and other efforts of the VISTAs, the agency served 1,568 homeless and near-homeless individuals this year, including 593 children, and helped 447 adults find full-time employment with over more than 200 employers.

## AmeriCorps NCCC

An AmeriCorps NCCC team partnered with the Mississippi River State Park to complete infrastructure and environmental tasks on campgrounds, trails, and staff facilities. The park is on the southern end of Crowley's Ridge and borders the Mississippi River. NCCC members assisted in campground improvements by raking leaves into burn piles, removing rotted railroad ties, replacing rusted barbecue grills, planting trees, and creating fish habitats for the park lake from recycled Christmas trees. NCCC members also reconstructed two sets of wooden steps in steep slopes and assembled a set of wooden steps to reduce soil erosion and improve water drainage on the trail. Members also replaced rotted lumber on multiple boardwalks within the park trails. Around the park facilities, members built a fence around the park's superintendent housing, demolished a rotted deck and painted the park interpreter's house. Members manufactured outdoor furniture and landscaped the park's volunteer housing and Visitor Center. Through the team's service, the community now has a safer recreational area.

Arkansas Children's Hospital requested an AmeriCorps NCCC team to assist staff at the ACH and Camp Aldersgate to improve the lives of children, families, and seniors. Camp Aldersgate is the only camp in Arkansas uniquely dedicated to serving individuals with special needs. NCCC members provided structured activities in classrooms, playrooms, and the pool. The team also helped ACH distribute toys and donations, collected data for research purposes, and helped volunteer services staff organize correspondence and paperwork. NCCC members helped camp office staff with logistics, inventory, volunteer applications, database management, and planning new activities. Additionally, members helped facilitate a weekly Seniors Day Out, in which members assisted with different activities for senior participants. During weekend camps, members engaged children with mental and physical special needs in a variety of learning activities. Members also completed facility maintenance tasks around the camp.

## Senior Corps Foster Grandparent Program

The White River Area Agency on Aging Foster Grandparent Program serves in 21 public schools, one preschool, and two Head Start programs. Approximately 30 percent of the students were performing below their grade level in reading and/or math or had low literacy levels. These students receive little or no encouragement, motivation, or support outside of the school system. Seventy-one Foster Grandparents served 221 K-12 students in daily tutoring sessions. As a result, 89 percent of the students mentored showed improvement in reading and/or math and were performing at their grade level. According to child care plans developed by volunteer sites, 126 children had low literacy levels and poor communication skills and had little support at home. Six Foster Grandparents served these children and as a result most of the three to five year old children engaged in the program had increased literacy levels and improved communication skills.

## Senior Corps RSVP

RSVP of Central Arkansas is sponsored by Future Builders, Inc., located in Wrightsville, just south of Little Rock. RSVP volunteers serve Pulaski, Saline, Lonoke and Garland Counties. RSVP volunteers have been trained and certified to train Medicare beneficiaries on how to protect, detect, and report fraud, abuse, and misuse of Medicare benefits. RSVP volunteers have provided more than 300 presentations to 25,451 individuals, and offered other counseling. RSVP of Central Arkansas partnered with the Arkansas Food Bank, Care-Link of Arkansas, Jackson House and Project Hope to collect and distribute food to low income, homeless, and disabled citizens in the service area. In 2014, 22 RSVP volunteers collected 238 pounds of food for this cause. Other activities include tutoring children in reading, language skills, and word comprehension, and working with the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which offers nutrition assistance to millions of eligible, low-income individuals and families and provides economic benefits to communities.

## Senior Corps Senior Companion Program

The Senior Companion Program with the West Central Arkansas Area Agency on Aging provides services for homebound seniors to keep them out of nursing homes and living dignified independent lives. The program provides services to seniors in Clark, Conway, Garland, Johnson, Hot Spring, Perry, Pike, Polk, Pope, Montgomery, and Yell counties. As the senior population continues to grow, a large percent in these areas live at or below poverty levels. The Senior Companion program provides services to seniors who would otherwise fall through the cracks of our Medicaid programs and cannot afford private pay services. A total of 113 volunteers assist with companionship, light housekeeping, meal preparation, respite, and transportation. The Independent Living Surveys indicated most of the clients are happy with the services they are receiving and feel the services allow them to remain in their homes and live independently. Most reported that their ability to remain in their situation had improved because they have a Senior Companion volunteer.

## Social Innovation Fund

In 2015, the Social Innovation Fund Pay for Success program expanded its reach to Arkansas and is conducting a feasibility analysis of a project targeted towards a state-wide strategy for the corrections system. The Social Innovation Fund is investing to expand the impact of one nonprofit in Arkansas.